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ABSTRACT

Sociolinguists have recently demonstrated the value of directives in indicating the relationship between status and linguistic form. The purpose of the instrument developed for this study was to quantify the coerciveness of directives on the basis of the thecretical approaches in the literature to objectify the comparison of directive forms. Drawing largely from the work of Ervin-Tripp, the instrument analyzed directives according to: voluntariness to involuntariness of compliance, ambiguity to lack of ambiguity in message form recipient of compliance benefit, and type of action requested. Salient additions and modifications to the basic directive form were alsc considered. The instrument was tested on 900 directives transcribed from taped, naturalistic interactions among three homogeneous groups of adolescent females frcm different class and ethnic backgrounds. (Author/CFM)

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AN OBJECTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR THE ANALYSIS OF DIRECTIVE COERCION

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From a sociolinguistic perspective, politeness generally results from a selection of linguistic alternatives which is appropriate in terms of the relative status of the speakers and the social context of the utterance. Politeness phenomena have, therefore, received considerable attention from investigators interested in formulating sociolinguistic rules. Early research investigated the tu/vous distinction (Brown and Gillman, 1961); Ervin-Tripp considered English address terms (1973); and more recently, attention has focused on the formation of directives (Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Gillman, 1974; Basso, 1974; Brown and Levinson, 1974; Montes, 1976; Ervin-Tripp, 1976). Lakoff (1973), Basso (1974), Brown and Levinson (1974), and Ervin-Tripp (1976) have provided a valuable theoretical framework for determining the relative coerciveness of directives. The instrument described below was intended to take the theoretical concerns presented in the literature and apply them to a body of field data by making them objective and giving them a quantitative value.

Drawing from the theories in the literature alluded to above, one can assume the existence of three interacting continua which, together, determine the coerciveness of a directive. One characteristic of politeness is that it leaves, or appears to leave, options open for the addressee. Thus,the first continuum, discussed most fully by Ervin-Tripp (1976), places a directive in terms of whether compliance appears to be voluntary. A coercive directive does not allow the addressee any options in compliance, whereas a non-coercive or polite directive allows for at least a show

of voluntariness. Closely related to this consideration is the second continuum which rates a directive in terms of whether it is ambiguous--either in content or addressee. Ervin-Tripp (1976) contends that a directive is more polite if it contains some ambiguity, and Lakoff (1973) argues that adults value the politeness inherent in such ambiguity more than they value efficiency in communication. Thus, the most coercive directive will allow the addressee no alternative interpretation. The third continuum is slightly more complex and considers the power relationship between speaker and addressee. The mid-point of this continuum is a position of solidarity between interactants; the coercive end places the speaker in a position of power over the addressee; and the non-coercive end places the addressee in a position of power over the speaker and, therefore, includes pleas, requests, and the like.

A directive consists of three major components, and selections of options for each component place the directive along each of the continua. The most salient component is the grammatical form of the principal verb since it is directly related to both ambiguity and voluntariness. The second major component is the recipient of the benefit of compliance, i.e., a consideration of for whom the action is to be performed; and the third component considers the type of action requested. The purpose of the instrument was to give each option within each component a numerical score based on its placement along the three continua. The total of the three scores would then indicate the coercion level of the directive.

In its present form, the instrument is designed to account for the data collected from three five-member groups of adolescent females during

twenty-seven hours of taped interactions. Although the examples are unique to that group, the instrument is flexible and can be adapted for use with other bodies of data. After the interactions were taped, nine hundred directives were extracted and transcribed. Each was then analyzed in terms of the instrument, and the instrument was adapted to account for the actual material in the corpus.

Each directive was given a numerical score on the basis of selections of alternatives within the three major components. The grammatical form of the principal verb was considered to be more salient in determining the relative coercion of the directive than were the categories of Recipient of Benefit or Action Requested. Therefore, the rank assignments were weighted so that the grammatical form category had double the value of any other category. Although the fact that the value was double was arbitrary, its being considered more important was not arbitrary. To a large degree, the form of the principal verb limits other possibilities for expressing voluntariness and ambiguity. The directive may be modified in significant ways which will increase its solidarity and, to some extent, make compliance appear more voluntary. However, no modulation can significantly alter the sense given to a directive by its principal verb. The ranking of the components is explained below.

Grammatical Form. Each directive was placed in one of four categories according to the grammatical form of the principal verb. The categories included the imperative, the let/let's form, the question, and the statement. Each was weighted as follows:

1. Imperative: (8 points)

(1) Glue a picture on it.

The imperative received eight points as the most coercive verb form because it is unambiguous and does not provide for unexplained non-compliance. It is, therefore, the directive type which allows the addressee the least voluntariness in response.

2. Let or Let's (6 points)

(2) Let me taste the glue.

(3) Let's get some Kool Aid.

Although these are both grammatical imperatives, they do not have the coercive force of other imperatives. In (2) the verb form increases voluntariness by moving along the power-solidarity-supplication continuum to the point where the addressee is seen as having power over the speaker. In (3) solidarity is invoked by the implication that the action will be shared.

3. Question (4 points)

(4) Why don't you use green?

A question directive is more ambiguous than either form already presented because it is formally identical to the information question, and the addressee may choose to interpret it as such if other constraints are met. It is, however, so frequently used as a directive that it is generally interpreted as one.

4. Statement (2 points)

(5) We could call the play "Romeo and Juliet ."

The statement is the most ambiguous and, therefore, the least coercive directive form. The difficulty with analyzing this form, and hence its value in conversation, is that it cannot always be clearly interpreted as a directive.

Recipient of Benefit. The intended benefactor of the requested action was also considered in determining the degree of coercion of the directive. This category received only half the weight of the Grammatical Form section since it is not as crucial in limiting power, ambiguity, and voluntariness. Four possible benefactors were considered.

1. Speaker (4 points)

(6) Give me your scissors.

Requesting that an individual perform an action for the benefit of the speaker asserts the propriety of the addressee's service to the speaker, and, therefore, asserts her power. A request from whose fulfillment only the speaker will benefit is a realtively coercive form.

2. Neither the speaker nor the addressee (3 points)

(7) Get one for Kay.

If the benefactor is to be a thrid party, the directive is less coercive than if only the speaker benefits because such a request indicates a measure of solidarity with someone in the group. Nevertheless, it is still a relatively coercive form because it still asserts the speaker's right to direct the addressee to perform an action in which she has no particular interest. The directive is, therefore, issued from a position of power relative to the addressee.

3. Both the speaker and the addressee (2 points)

(8) Let's hurry and clean it up.

When there is mutual benefit to the speaker and addressee, the directive is being issued from a position of solidarity. The speaker is not asking the addressee to perform a service, but rather to participate in a shared activity.

4. Addressee (1 point)

(9) Watch your head.

If the addressee is the sole benefactor, there is a greater degree of voluntariness in her compliance. If she does not choose to "watch her head," no one will suffer from that decision except her. Also, the speaker's apparent concern for the addressee indicates a measure of solidarity.

Action Requested. Directives were also classified in terms of what the addressee was being asked to do. Four possible actions were considered.

1. Stop performing (4 points)

(10) Stop, Girl.

This is classified as most coercive because it not only requests compliance on the part of the addressee, but it also indicates that the behavior she is now engaged in is unacceptable. It is, therefore, both a directive and a value judgment. As such, it is issued from a position of power rather than of solidarity.

2. Perform (3 points)

Perform directives are considered to be less coercive than stop directives because they do not evaluate the addressee's behavior and are, therefore, less powerful. Nevertheless, they are more coercive than the remaining categories since they attempt to generate action which is not presently in progress.

3. Delay (2 points)

(12) Wait a minute 'n I'll show ya.

Delay directives are ranked third because they condone the present behavior and ask only that it be delayed, not that it be terminated. Also, they do not attempt to generate an action as do the perform directives;

they merely attempt briefly to interrupt an action. Therefore, they indicate solidarity rather than power.

4. Allow (1 point)

(13) Can I be next?

Allow directives are ranked fourth because they indicate the addressee's power over the behavior of the speaker. They are, in a sense, requests for permission, and as such, place the addressee in a power position relative to the speaker.

Modification. Certain features are important in raising or lowering the coerciveness of a directive. Since the basic coerciveness of the directive has already been determined by the speaker's selection of the options outlined above, the modifications receive only +1 or -1 in determining the coercion level. They are not basic to the directive but are added to modulate it. There is no simple way to determine exactly how much each modulation affects the coerciveness of the final directive; however, since the basic value of the directive in terms of the components already discussed is more central to the issue of coercion, the scale of modifiers has been coordinated with the scale of basic components.

Five modifications were considered to increase the level of coercion.

1. Gotta (14) You gotta do the satin stitch.
2. Hafta (15) You hafta rub glue all around.
3. Sposta (16) You're sposta show us how.

Each of the above makes an otherwise non-coercive statement more coercive by eliminating the voluntary nature usually invoked by the statement form.

4. Better (17) You <u>better</u> watch whose arm yer gettin' paint on.

This form increases the coercion by giving the directive the force of a threat. In form, it implies that the addressee will benefit from compliance, i.e., she may avoid some physical injury by performing as instructed. This does not leave the impression that compliance is voluntary.

5. Intonation (18) WAIT!

Intonation is the most difficult type of modification to deal with objectively. While the importance of tone in raising the level of coerciveness is obvious, classifying the tone in an objective fashion is quite difficult. The researcher must depend on his/her own interactional skills, and the outcome is subjective at best.

Eleven modifications were found to decrease the level of coercion.

1. Intonation

Just as intonation can be used to decrease ambiguity and voluntariness, so can it be used to increase both. When an imperative is issued with question intonation, it loses some of its imperative force since it seemingly calls for an answer as well as or rather than an action. Also, what is commonly described as "whining" decreases the level of coercion since it underscores the speaker's lack of control and power and, therefore, her low status relative to the addressee.

2. Tag question (19) Open this, <u>will you</u>?

The tag reduces the opening imperative almost the level of the closing question by giving it the tentativeness and ambiguity of the request question.

3. Modal auxiliary (20) <u>Would</u> you help me?

Using a modal increases the voluntariness and the ambiguity of the request by modifying the mood of the central verb.

4. Address term (21) Henri, help me.

The address term, although it decreases the ambiguity, increases the solidarity to such a great extent that it lowers the overall coercion level.

5. Politeness marker (22) Somebody please help me.

Additions such as please are culturally designated as polite and, therefore, noncoercive.

6. Indefinite pronoun (23) Somebody pass me the glue.

Making the addressee indefinite opens the door to unexplained non-compliance One may simply choose to assume that the request was not intended for her. It is, therefore, both ambiguous and voluntary.

7. Second person plural pronoun (24) Y'all come on.

The second person plural pronoun accomplishes approximately the same thing as the indefinite pronoun in that the directive is not specific and may, therefore, be ignored by any one individual.

8. Well (25) Well, yer gonna hafto.

Well indicates a sense of hesitancy on the part of the speaker which lends an air of voluntariness to the directive.

9. All right (26) All right, everybody pick one.

10. OK (27) OK, yer gonna take it, and yer gonna cut it.

All right and OK are organizing devices which structure both the verbal and physical aspects of the interaction (Merritt, 1976). They receive a -1 because they carry a sense of mutual involvement and cooperation, thereby invoking solidarity.

11. Just (28) Just put one cup in for me.

Although just has many uses, the only one considered here is the apparent lessening of the seriousness of the request being made.

The list of modifiers is flexible and can be expanded. Those listed above are drawn from the data of the adolescent female study.

Additions. In a few cases, a phrase or clause is added to the directive to decrease or increase its coerciveness. Two additions seem salient in raising the coerciveness, and four are relevant in decreasing it. Additions which make a directive more coercive include the following:

1. Penalty (29) Stop flippin' that thing before I take it.

The specification of a penalty decreases both the ambiguity of the directive and the involuntariness of compliance.

2. Expletive (30) Damn it. Get over here.

An expletive increases coercion both by diminishing solidarity and asserting power and by diminishing ambiguity.

Additions which decrease the level of coerciveness include the following:

1. Explanation (31) Let me. I can

(32) Stop that. It hurts my nerves.

The "I can" in (31) explains the rationale for complying with the directive, "Let me." This lowers the coercion of the directive because it indicates that the speaker believes that the addressee merits an explanation and that compliance with the directive is viewed as voluntary or the explanation would not be necessary. "It hurts my nerves," in (32) explains why the request to "stop that" is being issued.

2. Disclaimer (33) I guess you just turn it over and press.

The disclaimer shifts some of the responsibility from the speaker and decreases coercion by letting the addressee know that the speaker herself is not totally committed , thus making compliance more voluntary.

3. Condition (34) If Sarah wants it, give it to her.

A condition states the circumstances under which the directive is to be performed. The condition makes the directive more voluntary by leaving the decision for its actual performance in the hands of the addressee. She decides whether the condition has been met and, therefore, decides whether or not to comply with the directive.

4. First person plural (35) We could put a picture on it .

The use of the first person plural increases the solidarity of the directive and, hence, lowers its coerciveness in the same way that the Let's grammatical form operates.

Again, the additions listed above were only those acutally found in the nine hundred directives examined. The list may be expanded to deal with additional information.

Using the above index, a directive is first given a point value in terms of the coerciveness of its principal verb, the recipient of the benefit of compliance, and the type of action requested. The highest score for the three components would be a sixteen, and the lowest possible score would be a four. After this basic score has been computed, the modifications and additions are considered. They may be used singularly or in combination. As used in the directive study alluded to above, the instrument included a consideration of repeated and deflected directives, but their analysis is more complex than an issue than can be discussed here. The entire instrument also includes a coding scale for the quantification of responses to directives.

In order to test the cognitive validity of the categoreis included in the portion of the coercion level index which deals with the assignment

of points to various components, a questionnaire was distributed to one hundred respondents. In each of three sections, sentences representing each of the divisions within the three major categories outlined in the instrument were paired in six combinations. Other variables considered in the instrument were held constant. Respondents were asekd to indicate which sentence in each pair they would consider more polite and would use with a high status person. In the section testing the Grammatical Form component, the following results emerged:

1. Statements were seen as more polite than imperatives by 85% of the respondents.
2. Questions were considered more polite than imperatives by 98%.
3. Let was considered more polite than the imperative by 69%.
4. The statement was seen as more polite than Let by 83%.
5. The question was viewed as more polite than Let by 99%.
6. The statement was seen as more polite than the question by 71%.

In the section designed to test the Recipient of Benefit component, respondents indicated the following:

1. The addressee benefactor was seen as more polite than the speaker benefactor by 68%.
2. The mutual benefit was seen as more polite than the speaker benefactor by 80%.
3. The third party benefactor was viewed as more polite than the speaker benefactor by 87%.
4. The addressee benefactor was considered more polite than the third party benefactor by 51%.
5. Mutual benefit was considered more polite than third party benefit by 54%.
6. The addressee benefactor was viewed as more polite than the

mutual benefit by 53%.

This section proved to be the least valid in the last three comparisons. Respondents seemed to find little difference between the politeness implied by a directive intended to benefit the addressee rather than a third party. Nor did they note a significant difference in politeness between directives intended for mutual benefit as opposed to those intended for a third party. There was no statistically significant difference between directives with the addressee as benefactor as opposed to those providing mutual benefit.

In the section of the questionnaire designed to test the validity of the Action Requested category, the following comparisons emerged:

1. Allow was considered more polite than stop by 75%.
2. Delay was considered more polite than stop by 82%.
3. Perform was seen as more polite than stop by 89%.
4. Allow was viewed as more polite than perform by 52%.
5. Delay was considered more polite than peform by 80%.
6. Allow was considered more polite than delay by 93%.

The least significant difference was found between allow and perform directives.

Although the responses did not correspond completely with the number of points assigned to each alternative, they did support the categories considered in the index because a majority of the respondents apparently judged coercion according to the same criteria as those used in the study. Therefore, for a majority of those responding to the questionnaire, the concerns of the instrument were cognitively salient.

The validation questionnaire also attempted to test the significance of the additions and modifications considered in the instrument. For this section, two sentences were paried, one containing the addition or modification and one without it. Each comparison validated the assumptions of the instrument with agreement ranging from 97% for gotta, hafta, and the politeness marker, to a low of 68% for well. For most additions and modifications agreement reached 80-90%.

By providing an objective approach to the analysis of directive coercion, the instrument presented herein brings the prevalent theories concerning linguistic politeness to bear on actual field data. The quantification of directive coercion on solid theoretical grounds makes possible a wide range of statistical comparisons which where hitherto not feasible. In the study for which the instrument was designed, each directive was assigned a point value; each girl's coercion mean was computed; a mean for each group was computed; the mean coerciveness of directives issued to each girl was computed; and each girl was ranked according to the coercion mean of the directives which she issued and of those she received. The sociometric rank of each girl within her own group was also calculated, and the various ranks were compared by the Spearman Rank Coefficient of Correlation. This made it possible to determine the relationship between social status and the use of coercion within each group and to compare the profile of each group to every other group. Chi squares were also computed to compare the selection of the various components by each girl and each group. Such comparisons revealed some valuable insights into the variable use of the directive system by members of differing socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups. Rigorous comparisons of differing groups require

objectivity in coding and analysis as does the replication of studies. It is hoped that this instrument will provide a beginning point for further investigation of the phenomenon of directive formation.

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